

Academies and maintained schools: what do we know?

- Academies receive their funding directly from the government, rather than through local authorities like other state funded schools.
- There are two types: converter academies (those deemed to be performing well that have converted to academy status) and sponsored academies (mostly underperforming schools changing to academy status and run by sponsors).
- Comparing the most recent Ofsted grade of each type of school, converter academies are the most likely to be good and outstanding while sponsored academies are more likely than maintained schools to be graded requires improvement or inadequate. But this is to be expected as converters were high performing, and sponsored low performing, to begin with.
- School performance in sponsored secondary academies has increased more quickly than in similar schools. The improvement is greatest in schools that have been academies for the longest, implying that the effect of academy status has a gradual impact on improving performance. There's little evidence available which looks at primaries.

School performance in sponsored secondary academies has increased more quickly than in similar schools



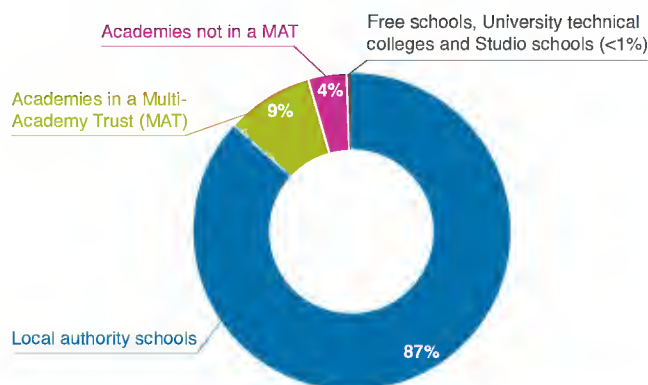
State-funded schools (including primary, secondary and special schools for pupils with special educational needs) fall into **two main groups**:

- Maintained schools—where funding and oversight is through the local authority. These are the **majority of schools** and are mostly either community schools (where the local authority employs the school's staff and is responsible for admissions) or foundation schools, where the school employs the staff and has responsibility for admissions.
- Academies—where funding and oversight is from the Department for Education (DfE) via the Education Funding Agency. They are run by an academy trust which employs the staff.

There are also grammar schools, which are state-funded selective secondary schools and which can be academies.

Types of primary school in England

Including academies by Multi-Academy Trust

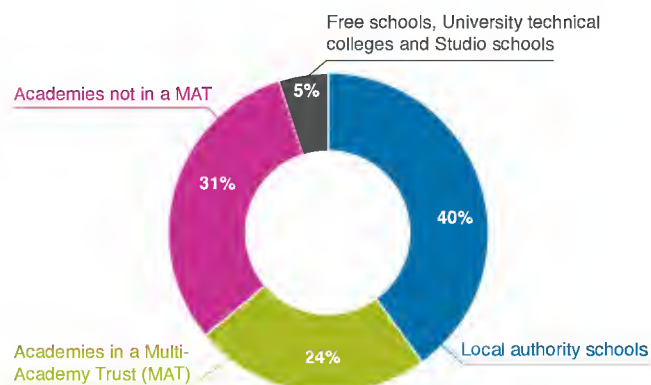


*School numbers are from Edubase (September 2014), information on whether an academy is in a MAT is provided by Department for Education (October 2014)

Source: Ofsted annual report 2013/14

Types of secondary school in England

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Academy freedoms

Academies are run by academy trusts and **don't have to** follow the **national curriculum** and tend to have **greater freedom** to set their own term times and admissions (although this is a complex area).

They still have to follow the same rules on **special educational needs** and **exclusions** as other state schools, and are **required** to provide a curriculum that is "balanced and broadly based, and includes English, mathematics and science". In terms of **admissions**, they also **still have to** follow the same rules as other state schools, but can set their own arrangements rather than these being determined by the local authority as is the case for many non-academies.

Evidence on the extent to which academies are using these new freedoms is mixed. A 2014 survey of academies by DfE **found** that 87%

say they are now buying in services previously provided by the Local Authority from elsewhere, 55% have changed their curriculum, 8% have changed the length of their school day and 4% have changed their school terms. Whilst various other changes were also reported, it is not clear to what extent these are a direct result of academy conversion rather than changes that would have taken place regardless.

A similar survey by think tank Reform and education body SSAT found slightly different percentages, but **concluded** that in terms of providing "something new and different to the education that went before [...] academies remain an unfinished revolution".

Studio schools, university technical colleges and free schools are all types of academies.

Academies fall into two main categories:

- **Sponsored academies**—these have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups, who have majority control of the academy trust. Most, but not all, sponsored academies were [previously underperforming](#) schools that became academies in order to improve their performance.
- **Converter academies**—these don't have sponsors, and [are schools](#) previously assessed as 'performing well' that have 'converted' to academy status.

There are just under [4,600 academies](#) open (excluding free schools—of which [there are](#) 254), about 70% of which are converter academies. A further 1,042 are [in development](#). A smaller proportion of primary schools are run by Multi-Academy Trusts (9%), compared to just under a quarter (24%) of secondary schools, [according to Ofsted](#).

Open academies (March 2015)

	Converter	Sponsored
Primary (and middle deemed primaries)	1,683	793
Secondary (and middle deemed secondaries)	1,358	501
Alternative provision and special schools	145	32
Other	19	49
TOTAL	3,205	1,375

Source: Department for Education, Open academies and academy projects in development March 2015

Academies in development (March 2015)

	Converter	Sponsored
Primary (and middle deemed primaries)	589	123
Secondary (and middle deemed secondaries)	213	38
Alternative provision and special schools	64	8
Other	5	2
TOTAL	871	171

Source: Department for Education, Open academies and academy projects in development March 2015

Three-fifths of academies are run by Multi-Academy Trusts

Roughly three-fifths (56%) of academies work together with others in academy chains governed by a Multi-Academy Trust, according to [data](#) supplied to us by Ofsted.

There are about 265 chains with three or more academies, the largest one governing 69 academies, according to the [latest figures](#) from the Department.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee has [criticised](#) DfE for allowing academy chains to grow in size without

independent assessments of their capacity and capability to do so. Currently, [17](#) sponsors have been formally paused from being able to expand further [because of](#) concerns over the performance of their schools by the Department, according to figures from November last year.

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The government has been criticised for a lack of accountability for academies

Academies, including free schools, are directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education, while all other state funded schools are accountable to local authorities. Both are inspected by Ofsted. Ultimately, DfE is accountable for the overall performance of the school system in England.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee [has said](#) “The Department presides over a complex and confused system of external oversight”, “allowing schools to fall through gaps in the system”. The government is yet to publish its response but the Schools Reform Minister Nick Gibb [has commented](#) that the oversight of schools is very clear, citing a rise in academic standards.

Regional Schools Commissioners were established as an extra layer of oversight in September 2014 [with the responsibility](#) for deciding which applications for academies would be taken forward, monitoring academy performance and also for taking action when an academy is underperforming. They are also meant to champion academy freedoms, [alongside Headteacher Boards](#) in each region which work with the RSCs to support struggling academies. We don't have much evidence to see how well they're working yet.

The two main ways used to assess the success of academies relative to other schools are looking at Ofsted inspections, and exam results.

Comparing the performance of academies and maintained schools is difficult

One way to compare the performance of converter academies with other maintained schools is to compare those which started out with the same Ofsted rating.

[Analysis by the Department for Education](#) on this basis found no significant difference in the proportion of secondary converter and maintained schools keeping their outstanding status (35% vs 33%). Secondary converter academies previously graded good were more likely to improve (16% vs 10%) and more likely to retain (56% vs 49%) their Ofsted grade than previously good maintained schools.

But there may be other [underlying differences](#) between the schools that became academies and schools with the same Ofsted rating that did not become academies, which are likely to have influenced both whether the school

became an academy and subsequent Ofsted grades.

The other – less informative – comparison is to look at the [most recent Ofsted grade](#) of each type of school. On this basis converter academies are the most likely to be good and outstanding, and the least likely to be graded as requires improvement or inadequate.

However, this is to be expected as schools are more likely to convert to academies if they're performing well according to their exam results or Ofsted grade so it's not surprising that these schools continue to be more likely to be judged Outstanding compared to maintained schools. There's also the [question](#) over whether schools that haven't yet been inspected under the new Ofsted framework should be included in the comparison.

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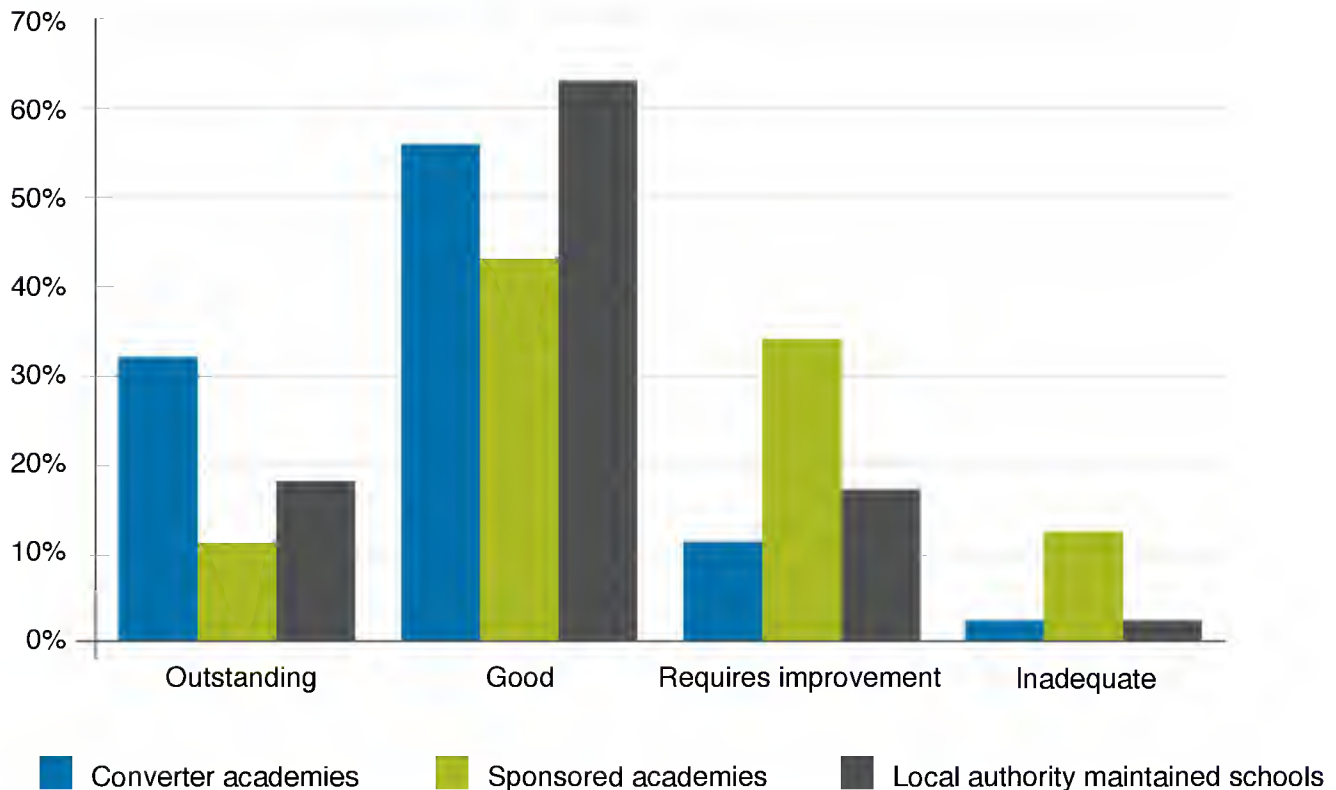


Conversely, sponsored academies are more likely than maintained schools to be graded requires improvement or inadequate. Again, this is not necessarily surprising: transition to

sponsored academy status has [become](#) the standard recommendation following school underperformance.

Academies' Ofsted performance

Ofsted overall effectiveness judgement for all schools in England, as at 31/12/2014



*Includes some schools inspected under the older Ofsted framework

Source: Ofsted Dataview (December 2014)

We also have to be careful with comparing Ofsted data because the [frequency of inspection](#) differs according to what the school's previous grade was: inadequate schools have another inspection within the next two years, whereas good and outstanding schools are inspected

within the next five years (but may be sooner if concerns are brought to the attention of Ofsted). A school's existing grade may not reflect the school's current position if the most recent inspection was many years ago.

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Analysis of GCSE results suggests the greatest improvement can be seen in schools that have been academies for the longest, but we don't know much about primary performance

Some have suggested it is [too early to tell](#) whether maintained schools that turned into academies since 2010 have improved compared to other maintained schools, and most of the research so far has considered secondary schools only: [very little work has been done](#) looking at primary schools.

Looking just at the [latest GCSE results](#), converter academies appear to be the highest performing: in 2014 63% of pupils in converter academies achieved 5 A*-C GCSE grades including English and Maths, compared to 55% in maintained schools.

Sponsored academies appear to be the lowest performing, with 45% of pupils having achieved 5 A*-C GCSE grades including English and Mathematics.

But, again, the differences mostly reflect the fact that converter academies were relatively high-performing before they became academies and sponsored academies relatively low-performing before they became academies.

In order to properly understand how academies have performed we need to compare them to

similar schools still in the maintained sector. One such [analysis](#) gave mixed results: using some measures of attainment at GCSE, two years after they opened sponsored academies were performing better than similar non-academy schools. However, over the same time period there was no difference between converter academies and similar non-academy schools.

The most comprehensive [research](#) on the GCSE performance of academy schools to date is that by Professor Steve Machin and colleagues at LSE. They compared results over time of sponsored academies to a group of maintained schools with similar characteristics at the time of conversion. Performance in sponsored academies increased more quickly than in the similar schools. The improvement was greatest in schools that had been academies for the longest, implying that the effect of academy status has a gradual impact on improving performance.

However, the [130 schools](#) they looked at became academies between 2002 and 2009, under the Labour government, which represent just 7% of the much [larger number](#) of secondary academies we have now.

Further reading:

- This House of Commons Library [note](#) covers Frequently Asked Questions and the issues regarding Academies and free schools.
- This House of Commons Library note covers [Converter academies statistics](#): it shows the pattern of conversion over time, by school type and by area.
- Detailed explanations of school categories are available from the [Department for Education](#) and the [New Schools Network](#).

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